

BROADCAST 5023

TO: Local Directors, Foster Care and Adoption Supervisors and Workers,
Licensed Child-Placing Agencies, Comprehensive Services Act (CSA)

FROM: Lynette Isbell, Director, Division of Family Services
Therese Wolf, Foster Care Program Manager

DATE: June 30, 2008

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SUBJECT: Foster Care Service Plan Requirements – Legislative Changes

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Effective July 1, 2008, additional information related to independent living services and sibling placement, visitation and communication must be included in the foster care service plan as a result of legislation enacted during the 2008 General Assembly. This broadcast provides new guidance for local departments of social services (LDSS) and licensed child placing agencies (LCPA) related to these changes. This guidance supersedes existing guidance on service planning in Volume VII, Section III, Chapter B, Foster Care.

Independent Living Services

House Bill (HB) 149 and Senate Bill (SB) 249 adds language to the *Code of Virginia* requiring LDSS and LCPA to address the independent living needs of youth beginning at age 14. The service plan must describe the child's needs and goals in the areas of counseling, education, housing, employment, the development of money management skills, and access to essential documents along with other specific independent living services that will be provided. Independent living services to be provided, and by whom, must also be documented in the service plan. This requirement eliminates the need for a separate Transitional Living Plan for older youth.

Chafee Independent Living funds allocated to LDSS are available to pay for these services. LDSS and LCPA are encouraged to explore how the quarterly Virginia Youth Advisory Council conferences and regional youth events may meet some of the independent living skills needs of older youth. For more information regarding these events contact Patrick Plourde at 804-726-7577 or patrick.plourde@dss.virginia.gov.

Sibling Placement, Visitation and Contact

HB 1530 requires the foster care service plan to also describe the visitation plan between a child and his siblings and the reasonable efforts that must be made to place siblings together. Placing siblings together is a priority unless it is not in the best interests of the child(ren) or the special needs of the child require placement away from siblings. Factors that should be considered and may prohibit the placement of siblings together include: a child's clinical need for a more intensive placement setting than his siblings; a history of abusive behavior between siblings that continues to create safety concerns for one or more of the children; and the disruption of a child's stable placement and the impact on that child, solely to place siblings together.

If siblings are placed separately, a visitation or communication plan must be developed to encourage regular and frequent visitation. The visitation or communication plan must take into account the wishes of the child and specify the frequency of the visitation or communication. Visitations or communications may include face to face visits, sibling respite care, telephone calls, letters, email correspondence or any other regular and consistent form of contact between the siblings. The visitation or communication plan must also address the party(ies) responsible for encouraging and carrying out the visitation or communications plan and any related requirements or restrictions (e.g., individual responsible for ensuring transportation for visits; need for supervised visits; the role of the provider in the visits or communication plan, etc.). LDSS may, with approval from the Respite Care coordinator at the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), also use Respite Care funds administered by VDSS to develop respite care foster homes capable of providing regular siblings visits. For information on the use of these funds, contact Deborah Tomlinson at 804-726-7967 or deborah.tomlinson@dss.virginia.gov.